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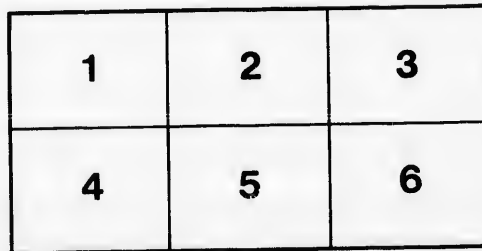
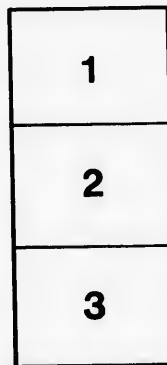
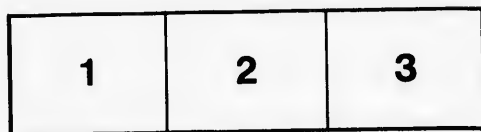
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AN ESSAY

— ON —

PURE ETHICS,

WITH A THEORY OF THE MOTIVE.

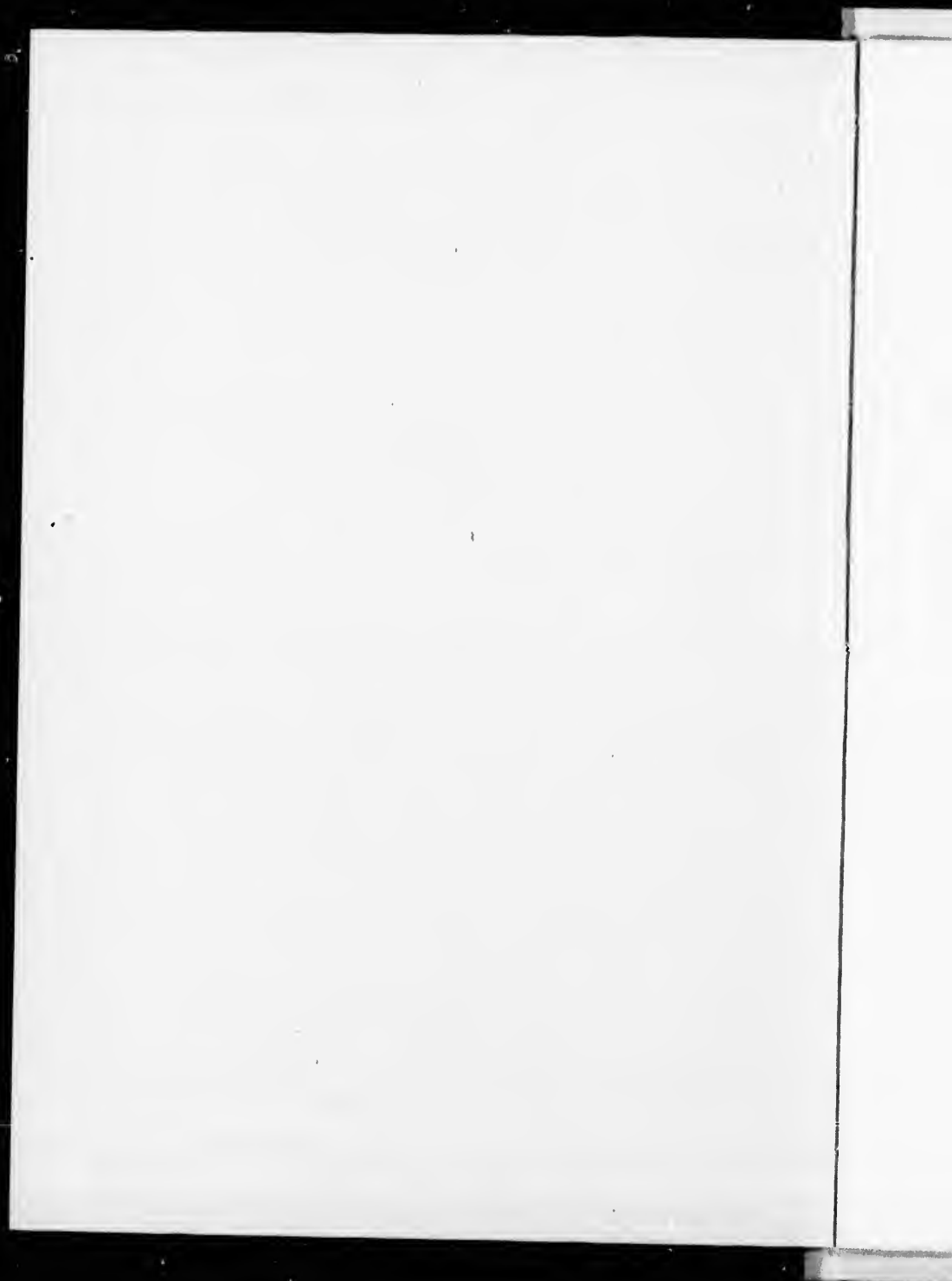
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AN ESSAY

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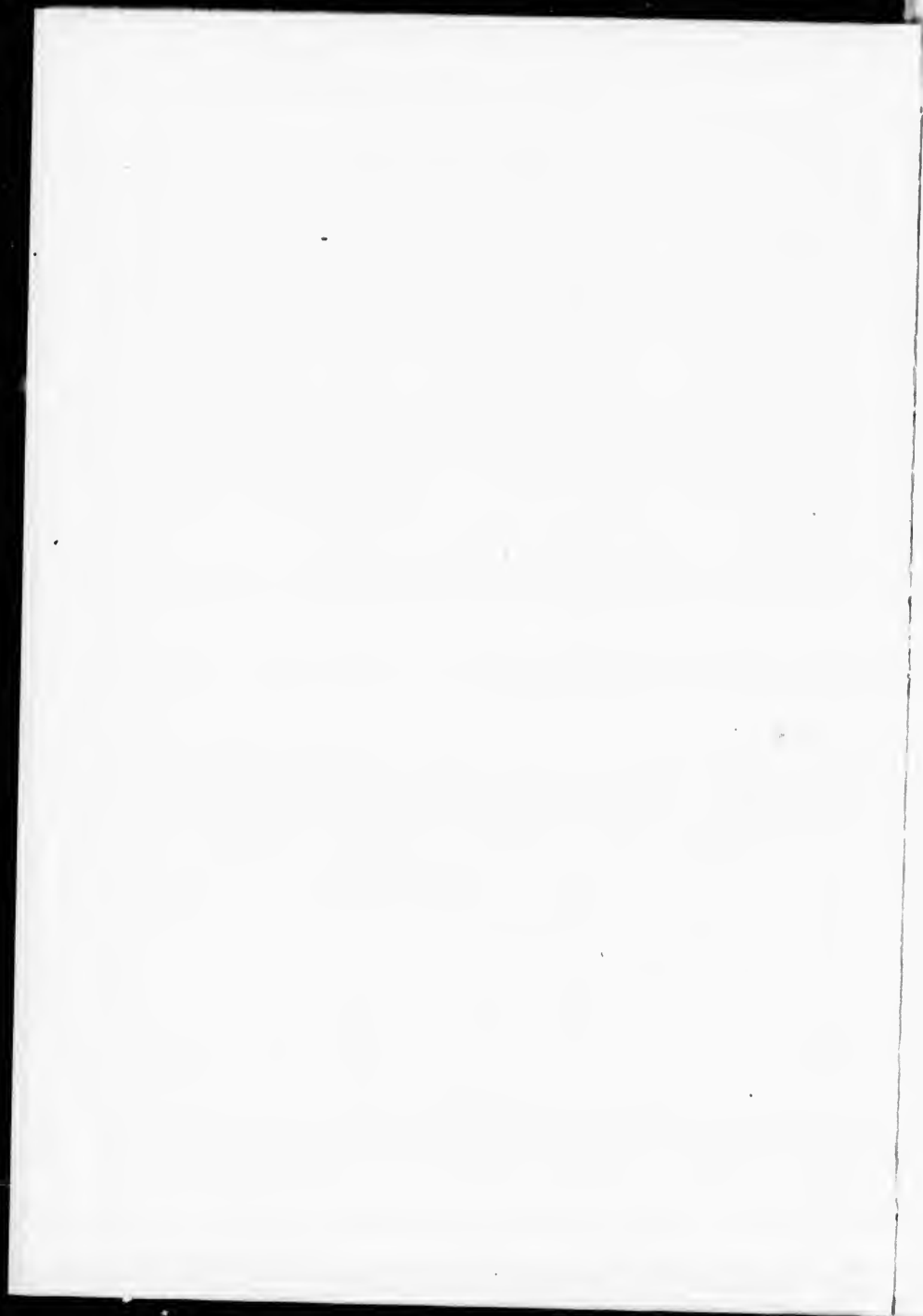
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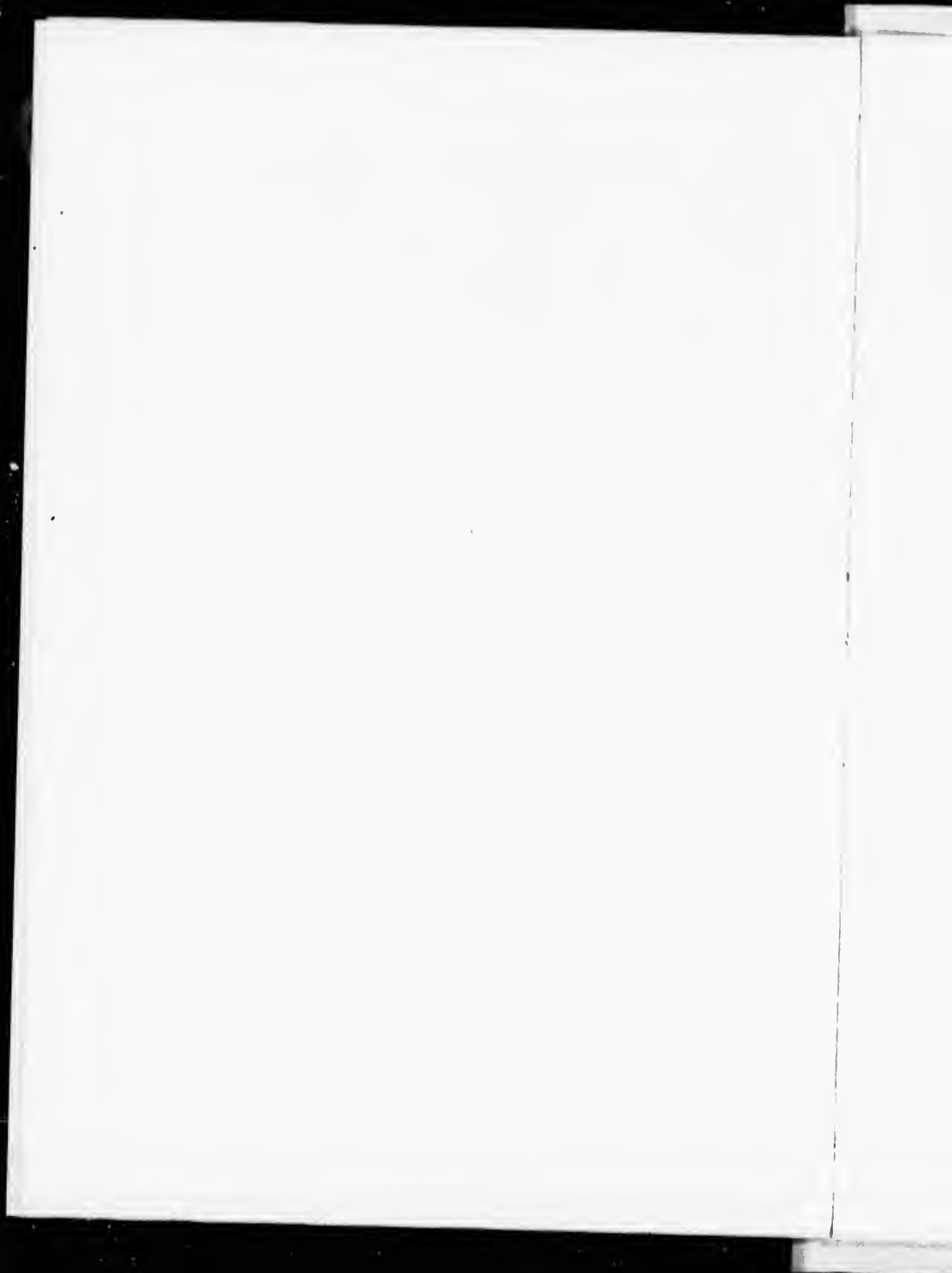
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P R E F A C E .

This Essay has arisen out of confirmed dissatisfaction with the customary treatment of the science with which it deals, and out of the long-haunting conviction that by far the greatest difficulty of that science centred in the explanation of moral motive. The writer finally arrived at conclusions which he has not only been unable to shatter by reconsideration but has found to be corroborated, in some cases unwittingly, by several of the most powerful minds who have investigated the subject. His sketch is issued with the sole hope that it may be of use.



ETHICS,

WITH A THEORY OF THE MOTIVE.

BY W. DOUW LIGHTHALL, B.A., B.C.L.

Christian theology—the science behind, and distinct from, the religion—must assume a certain chain of positions before it can be in final clear concord with modern discovery. It has made its passage from those long ages which demanded but tests of experience to an epoch which, correct or not, is only quieted with the demonstrations and the probabilities of science.

The great questions of Good and Bad, of Right and Wrong—that is to say, great ethical questions—are of such near importance to religion that it is imperative in such an epoch that Christ's doctrine of uncalculating self-devotion should be proven accordant with proper inductive and analytical studies of them.

Ethics has been pursued from two opposite quarters. One group of schools has sought in many forms to define Good and Right from ideas in the fully developed conscience, and thence to arrive at the nature of conscience itself. The other group examines simple instances of good and thence attempts to show in what manner the developed ideas are built up. The former directly examine a complex fact; the latter proceed to its explanation from elementary components. Those usually hold in some form that a special faculty of the mind is at work, frequently termed "the moral faculty," whose operations cannot be resolved into other mental elements; these believe the disputed ideas to be products of common reasonings and experiences of pleasure and pain. But both parties in any case admit that the Virtuous man does, if sufficiently alive to the circumstances, at once perceive the Good and Right. Those who begin by contem-

plating the notion as it emerges from his mind in full beauty, are consequently apt to be correct in their *appreciation* of it, or delicate perception that this and that thing are good or bad, and this and that act right or wrong. Often this delicate perception is, for obvious reasons, lost by the student of the other method, though his *analysis*, as far as it may go, is usually more clear. It should never be missed from sight that *both* appreciation and analysis require attention as mutually corrective lights.

A few words now on the general ground-work of the science. Good and right are only qualities of things and deeds, and in their actual sense can only be so understood. When we predicate a thing as good we think of it as a source of benefit. When we predicate a deed as good we may use the word in one of two meanings: either that the deed is good of itself, no matter by whom or in what surroundings done, in which meaning we simply place it in the category of good things; or that it is good relatively to the intention of the actor, who does it with a beneficial motive. Hence the terms "absolutely" and "relatively" good, and Absolute and Relative Ethics. "Right" means "best under the circumstances," but has likewise a double meaning corresponding to that of "good."

If a good thing is thought so because a source of benefit, we may hope to find the clue to goodness through considering what a benefit is. But here the two groups divide their path, one side declaring that "benefit" merely returns to an original faculty for the perception of good; and the other proceeding to examine the various grades of benefit and seek their common quality. A thing, they find, can be of benefit only in relation to some end or use; which end is further discovered to be the benefit of conscious beings, generally men—and their benefit to consist of the greatest ultimate happiness which the thing can effect towards them—which happiness, among men, will be a pleasure or a structure of delicate but satisfying pleasures.

So much for things. But in an act, looked at otherwise than as a thing, intention comes in. The gift of a competency for life is undoubtedly bad if made in order to bribe the donee. To act with moral merit one must *seek* to act well. Now, to seek any ob-

ject some motive or moving force is necessary, and this, the analyzing party say is, in every case, desire of pleasure.

On two points, consequently, the appreciators and the analyzers take issue. Are perceptions of good to be referred to a separate faculty or to our sensibilities to pleasure? And is the *motive* of good anything other than desire of pleasure? The Appreciators object principally: (1) That pleasure is far too low an element to be in any form identical with good; (2) that pleasurable desire is selfish in essence, whereas right motive is not; and (3) that such theories overlook the binding force or obligation which attaches to laws of duty. They feel compelled to turn elsewhere for explanation.

The Analyzers urge that pleasure can somehow be discerned at the bottom of every sample of good, and that acts and their motives may be ranged in a series of grades, from the lowest desire up to even righteousness itself. And, besides, that no other tenable motive-force than theirs can be shown; which allegation they sometimes illustrate by a criticism of the ethical doctrine worked out by the profoundest of Appreciators, Kant. If these positions are sound if good and the motive of right action can be reduced to known elements in such manner as not to belie the appreciation referred to above, the theory of analysis which results so will have for support the great logical Law of Parcimony, which forbids the entertainment of a more complex theory when a simpler one will suffice.

My essay has nothing to do with the illustrations, experiments, inductive steps and other methods by which the latter party trace out their connection between pleasure and good, desire and righteous motive. Suffice that they have of late years been fast enlarging of their ranks.

Christianity, resting its ethical system principally on the developed consciousness in practice, has no prejudice against scientific names and methods unless in practice, where alone it assumes a knowledge, their outcome is bad. But if the charges made by the Appreciators are correct, there is a drawn battle between Christianity and the pleasure-theory, which must be decided by the life or death question, "Which is true?" Let us therefore

examine the charges. If incorrect, that danger is done away, and Christian churches may harmlessly even form alliance as bodies with the tenet acquitted.

The pleasure-theory takes two chief shapes. Egoism claims that the standard of good and motive of right for me is my own personal pleasure, or a structure of pleasures composing my happiness. Utilitarianism sets up the greatest happiness of the greatest number. In its former shape the theory being admittedly selfish has, at least, the second of those defects before-mentioned, which are charged by the hostile party. The aimed-at end is rejected by the practical conscience, and the motive does not explain true moral action. In the second shape the end aimed at is good, but it seems impossible for a man who acknowledges only desire as a motive to really seek the pleasure of others by any other means than pursuing his own; and thus we are again brought up at selfishness.

Commonly made to both shapes is the objection that pleasure can be in no manner essentially connected with good, because it has a gross, as opposed to a lofty, character. The proposition that Pleasure is Good is rejected entire. We demur to levelling our noblest actions to so grovelling a field, being certain that moral feeling is sublimer than gratification.

But the objection is not so obviously valid when it is advanced that though Pleasure is not Good, it is yet the lower form out of which the latter has been evolved, refined, constructed; just as man has been evolved, with his pity, his love, his worship, with his thoughts among the stars, and his aspirations into eternity, from the pettiness of an amœba-state. Like "man" and "amœba" therefore, like "sight" and "sensation," like all names of the lower and the higher in grades of evolution. so "pleasure" and "good" must as terms be kept distinct. There is recognized even an intermediate form, the Beautiful, between the pleasant and the good. The first two have their field, and end in self. The confusion of their names is but one fruit of two productive fallacies; of the loose transference, to a genus of allied feelings, of the word "pleasure," which language had long, though likewise loosely, appropriated to a species; and secondly, of a great characteristic

fallacy of the nineteenth century to the effect that having comprehended the elements or origin of a thing, the thing itself, or all the rest of its relations, are comprehended. In truth it is frequently not even reduced to its factors. The rock out of which a statue will be made is not the statue; nor is the preliminary cutting into shape: neither do these contain all the factors of the statue;—the *Development*, which above all makes it what it is, being omitted. *The statue is best comprehended from itself.* And so are man's moral perceptions. Those Hebrews of old, who investigated them from this standpoint, defined their characteristics and knew their intricacies much more deeply than the disciples of Spencer, though the form of their teachings was not the same. The good remains the good; pleasure retains its acknowledged lowness; the only thing claimed is a structural relation. Even the term "happiness" is not synonymous with (objective) "good," as the idea implied is less noble, and besides, a more extensive notion attaches to the latter, which, though perhaps it coincides in the human sphere with the notion of happiness, includes benefits of any other kind possible in a different existence, or to a different race. (Still, we recognize it only as possible.)

We seek then the Good, a form higher, in the same scale, than happiness, and gloriously beyond pleasure. But now we come to the second objection, that desire is essentially selfish, while right motive is not. "I," says the Egoist, "make my own pleasure my aim, and by the desire of it I am moved to moral action." Hence the Egoist is ruled out of the race, acknowledging a conscious selfishness which we feel to be no explanation of the motives of right. And yet the pleasure he takes in his sympathies with mankind may in some particular individual be as active and as far-reaching in effect as the Utilitarian's who sets up the happiness of others. But how is it possible for the Utilitarian to set up others' happiness? In aiming at it is he not swayed by their happiness reflected in his own mind, and only by that? For the pleasure of another as such can never be his pleasure. What, then, is the moving force in his heart?

It is the *subconscious* happiness reflected in him from their's

and made his, unknown to himself, by his automatic power of sympathy. He does not seek it—he spurns it if he can. It is not his end—it is only the psychical machinery by which his end is attained. He seeks to keep nothing in mind but the object he has intended. It is only when he turns his introspective thought to an analysis of his motives that he finds himself apparently swayed by his own delight. The truth is that by representation—our power of imagining things not present—we can both call up our own past and future pleasures, and also those past, future and present, of other persons. And in calling up those of two or of ten, we experience greater pleasure than of one from the psychological principle that pleasures are superior in quality proportionately to the number of their sources. So that when we recall, however indistinctly, the happiness of all society, with whom the conscientious man grows to connect every deed performed for others, we experience a feeling of vastly finer quality than when we turn our thoughts upon self. Imagination in this aspect may be likened to a mirror whose face we can direct towards the world or our own minds—receiving in the one case the small image of a vast and beautiful landscape, but in the other a larger image of one contracted spot.

Now the point is that we are practically oblivious to this process. Our conscious object is solely to do the good. The elaborate arrangements of pleasure and pain and their desire and aversion within us are only a subconscious mechanism. A true man, as has been frequently said, would perish for his race's good, even though he believed his own possibilities of happiness were doomed to everlasting extinction. His nature has become a correct and sensitive meter of the value of actions as they affect himself and that human race into whose being his own is extended, and he lays down his life with, brimming over every personal despair, the half-conscious joy of a universe. But, though it moves him, he does not think of it as in himself. He dimly notices its influence there only as the power sufficient for an object outside. The mighty sophism-destroying judgment of Christ: "He that saveth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for my sake shall save it" is an expression of this; and

Bacon writes: "We read that some of the elect and holy men" (St. Paul and Moses) "in an ecstasy of charity and impatient desire of the good of communion, rather wished their names blotted out of the book of life than that their brethren should miss of salvation."

If it is the conscious intention which decides the Relative Ethical character of a deed, then the predominant and crucial characteristic of rightness is *thought*, not feeling; and it is proper to call it an *intellectual* fact. The scale of goods in absolute Ethics likewise is undoubtedly conditioned by the laws of intellectual knowledge.

Most advocates of Utilitarianism, while constructing each his more or less valid schedule of objective goods, and arguing in his own fashion for their common principle of greatest happiness, pass by the need of a critical view of the motive, such as has been above attempted. But Schopenhauer in his "Groundwork of Ethics," a book disfigured with many displays of coarseness and lack of moral appreciation, yet full of keen logical analysis, exposes the secret as follows:—"C'est quand la raison dernière d'une action ou omission réside dans *le bien et le mal* d'un autre être 'intéressé à titre de patient': alors l'agent dans sa résolution ou son abstention n'a rien d'autre en vue que la pensée du bien et du mal de cet autre. * * * C'est cette *direction de l'action* qui seule peut lui imprimer un caractère de bonté morale." "Or, pour que mon action soit faite uniquement *en vue d'un autre*, il faut que le bien de cet autre soit pour moi et directement un motif au même titre ou mon bien à moi l'est d'ordinaire." * * "C'est le phénomène quotidien de la *pitié*." (Tr. A. Burdeau.)

By Mill it does not seem to have been noted. But it is so by Bain, though under the simple head of Sympathy, in his "Emotions and the Will." (C. vi., §. 2.) Grote has a nearly equivalent explanation, set forth in his own way. (Fragments on Ethical Subjects, Cap. on Nature of the Ethical Sentiment.) Schopenhauer afterwards spoils his discovery by metaphysically referring sympathy to some mysterious pantheistic consciousness of an actual unity between the personality of the individual and that of all other beings.

Yet, to clearly conceive this relation of the conscious and sub-conscious factors is to remove the kernel difficulty of Ethics. It is not, certainly, hard to fall into other errors, such as overlooking that men differ personally in their perceptions of pleasure and pain; or that all practical systems are empirical, and result in perplexing divergencies of standard; but to overlook the relation above-mentioned is to abandon the only talisman which preserves us in the centremost magic chamber and can alone save from Kant's fatal illogicality respecting the motive, from the reproach of selfishness which attaches to Hume, and from the third alternative, despair of the problem.

It is essential, further, for the pressing good of mankind, that moralists should make that relation prominent, which none but Schopenhauer has been conscious enough of its importance to do. They are all aggravatingly inexplicit, and blind when passing near the spot.

But to proceed to another matter. By misconception much has been made, in our science, of the government, the behests, the Law, of Reason. The matter stands about as follows: that we recognize pleasures and pains intuitively, and that by comparison we awake to further intuitions of quantity and quality—these are the purely intuitional elements: the Reasoning Faculty then performs its ordinary function of extending our general knowledge of objects; and from each of these, either by direct contact or by association with previous known objects, we derive special pleasures or pains. Intelligence thus operates merely as a larger light on the path of life, a more extended view, an opener of greater stores of motive-producers. We are swayed no less exclusively than before by our feelings (for the Reasoning Faculty has of itself no motives), but our motives are more largely drawn from things distant, future and great.

Deeds done with personal happiness as their conscious aim are properly not right or good, but æsthetic, actions if they have any intellectual element at all, and may only be called good if performed on a higher principle as parts of the other system. To a similar category should belong actions performed to win the applause or avoid the censure of men, though considerable ethical

theories have been founded on this class alone, nor do habit or heredity explain anything essential to ethical acts. They should take no place in pure Ethics.

If the first and second objections have been successfully thus removed, and Utilitarianism cut plainly loose from its dangerous drift towards Egoism, Christianity may view serenely the discussions which constantly proceed upon the third. The suggestion can here be contributed that moral obligation may have its root in subconscious pain of disobedience, acting as machinery for the reference of an objective force to moral rule by the fully conscious stratum of mind when contemplating the rule.

The man who complains at being unable to do right without such sub-conscious powers, is no more reasonable than he who grumbles that he cannot see without eyes, protesting that he is *chained to*, not *provided with*, the eyes.

The high type of feeling allied to pleasure with which we are provided is moral feeling, and is only so allied through being constructed of delicate pleasures in certain relations, as a cathedral is constructed of rocks, hewn, carved and built together. Its elements rise from every object we can associate with sensation, that is to say, practically every object we can know. In the perfectly educated imagination it is the one supreme and universally-drawn delight, and is directed to a harmony between all conscious powers and the universe; a harmonious development and exercise of them, which is the system or intellectual vision called The Good. Harmony of any kind only exists in relation to ourselves. It is that related state of objects in which we exert our powers upon them in natural proportions of exercise and rest, and consequently with ease. Natural exercise of a power is its condition, normally, of greatest pleasure.

The whole of our sensibilities thus form an apparatus which practically amounts to a distinct moral sense or conscience; so that Christian, Buddhist, Confucian, and Greek are furnished by nature with a delicate criterion or quasi-intuition of the Good, and have only to argue clearly to agree. The Good is definite, measurable and practically knowable to men.

The moral sense (its action subconscious) is the one arbiter of

Relative Ethics. Then using the experiential base of conscious pleasure, intelligence enters the field and expounds the scheme of Absolute Ethics.

In all this there is the finest known example of the argument from Design. One of evolution's principal agents in developing mankind was the association of pain with things injurious, and of pleasure with the beneficial. The Good is the intellectual system of the universally beneficial. The imagination of it then, if we can be brought to imagine it fully, will afford, by this very constitution of our natures, the highest pleasure. And by the same constitution within us, when the Good is vividly presented, which by some method of future education our race can hope to behold unerringly done with each individual, when it shall be equipped with its full measures of religion and knowledge—of motive and light—we shall not be able to help being attracted, forced and swayed sublimely and absorbingly into its pursuit; and so if man's nature be developed in some after life on a method allied to the present, as seems probable if the universe be a unity, then all must finally attain to the love and practice of perfect Right. And the pressure which, irresistibly combining the force of every event which strikes him, with more and more precision as he advances in intelligence, is quietly and persistently urging man, and through him the physical universe, up to the limits of imaginable perfection, is it not the answer to pessimisin, to the agnostic, and to the atheist who rails at the imperfections of the world?

The perfect vision of the Good towards which by its nature our moral feeling impels is, what has been said, a harmony between all conscious powers and the universe. What then are *all* conscious powers and what is the universe? Is it only mankind and the sensitive animals by whom happiness can be enjoyed? And only in the life they spend on earth? Or are there other relations beyond, around and after this sphere, with which the destiny of beings able to "look forward and backward" should also harmonize? Is it true that of the interminable ages of time we possess but a moment, and are doomed to be finally quenched as to every possibility of our powers, or to sleep for millions of periods amid scattered Forces till we wake and rise without

remembrance, connection or effect reaped into our next existence from the truth, the sacrifice, the dignity, the moral plans, of this? Is it true that we men live alone, and by and for ourselves alone, in this terrible, boundless prison, without the knowledge, supervision or guidance, or something to us their equivalent, of Another mighty to save? Man's thoughts, after he is evolved into man, turn naturally to investigate the great questions of God and immortality, and the relations of our being, and hence of our conduct, to and in view of these, which he observes are of infinitely superior importance to the business of the day. And if God Himself be perfectly good and wise, shall he not know the Good and will it, and has He not made it and is it not His command? Morality therefore depends to an immense extent upon the religious system which decides these questions, and to the Christian it comes to imply the will of Our Father, and the lives and acts we owe Him.



